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ABSTRACT

Adult education in the United States is again beginning to emerge as a potentially important dimension of national policy as a way to retrain the work force to be internationally competitive. Skepticism has been expressed about what "retraining" actually means. Federal government initiatives for adult and continuing education have been few and far between, so the dynamic that animates continuing education programs is not found at the federal level. Workplace continuing education shows a bias toward programs for upper and middle management. A more worker-driven dynamic that creates more educational opportunities for more employees is in its infancy. Business and industry continuing education is very loosely coupled with public education on a contractual basis. State programs are usually "terminal" with few direct linkages or articulation with other formal education. The state-funded public school programs provide "adult education" that is basic, remedial, and inescapably lower class. Adult educators in public school value making money and view colleagues as competitors. Some principles of continuing higher education are an institutional focus and a professional focus. The culture of continuing education professionalism has developed belief systems or "cults" to gain acceptance for adult education: the cults of the academy, corporation, student, and professionalism. (Contains 14 references.) (YLB)

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Paper presented to the Graduate Program at the University of Florence (Italy), Department of the Science of Education
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THE DYNAMICS OF AMERICAN ADULT EDUCATION

Paul J. Edelson, Ph.D.

Someone looking at American adult education today will be struck by the fact that it is once again beginning to emerge as a potentially important dimension of national policy, this time through the morphology of retraining the American workforce in order that it and American industry will become more internationally competitive.

Presidential candidate Bill Clinton, now President Clinton, using some of the ideas of Secretary of Labor Robert Reich (1991), made continuing education which was operationalized as "lifelong learning" a key to American economic revitalization in his successful election campaign. In Clinton's January 1993 State of the Union address he mentioned the concept of lifelong learning again- but without details, and we are still waiting for specific plans.

An earlier idea of Clinton's suggested that it would be mandatory for companies beyond a certain size to invest in worker training- in short to make this type of capital reinvestment a cost (or regular factor) of doing business. But, in truth, worker reeducation is already done by those companies who recognize the need to improve and stay

competitive. We are waiting to see if there will be new government initiatives in this area and what their focus might be.

Already there has been much skepticism about what "retraining" actually means and what standards should be used to develop and evaluate programs. For example, is it simply providing a quick dose of training so that an individual can speedily reenter the workforce- regardless of the type and level of job? Or, is it career redevelopment implying a more comprehensive and lengthy approach to career developent? In fact, there has been very little attention paid to this issue at all.

We develop our careers, or rather a narrative of "career" retrospectively when we try to make sense of our own work histories. It is only then that a concept of career, or integrative theme actually emerges. It looks, from the outside, like a nicely woven, carefully constructed, tapestry- but it is in reality the outcome of many small decisions or stitches that we make that appear unimportant or minor at the time. When a person loses their job, should the attempt be to plug them back into a position similar to the one they just vacated or to train them for a new "career" or job? Or should the process be highly decentralized and driven by the wishes of the participants

through allocations made directly to them? The only major experience in government career programs we have had in the U.S. has been targeted at the entry level- and even then there is still considerable debate about whether it is best to prepare people for any job and just get them working, or to prepare them for higher skilled, specialized occupations that they may have more difficulty in securing owing to the volatile nature of the labor market at any particular time?

In the post World War II period, aside from the GI Bill which made it possible for returning World War II servicemen to enter college with government stipends, the only other government program that could be identified as having a substantial impact for adult and continuing education was the Higher Education Act of 1965 with its provisions for educational training aid for the inner cities that was a component of President Lyndon Johnson's "Great Society" program (Leahy 1991). I mention the two actual examples of the GI Bill and the Higher Education Act and the potential program of President Clinton to illustrate that federal government initiatives for adult and continuing education are few and far between. So if we are searching for the dynamic that animates the thousands of continuing programs serving millions of students we will not find it at the federal level.

As suggested earlier, industry has substantial programs and a number of major studies refer to business continuing education as a "shadow" educational system, as large as all of organized education combined (Eurich 1985, 1990). These analyses of workplace continuing education show that it runs the gamut from retraining in the use of new equipment at the worksite, tuition assistance for returning to school to take a course or earn a degree, management development, and in-house training divisions, schools, or institutes, some even degree granting.

Historically, there has been a bias towards programs for upper and middle management, with less attention paid to line workers- but industry leaders- by that I mean the top most innovative and competitive companies- have begun to embrace a more worker driven, centrifugal dynamic, that is more egalitarian and therefore creates more educational opportunities for greater numbers of employees. But this development is really just in its infancy and it is still a safe generalization that most industry programs are management oriented and have that coloration. Nevertheless, industry downsizing, I believe, will set into motion powerful incentives for continuing education for those remaining employees fortunate enough to be retained.
One may question the ethics of coaxing more productivity out of fewer people- but competitive forces within business and

industry are very narrowly, and some say properly focused in this direction.

Business and industry continuing education is very loosely coupled with public education - except through a procurement model. This entails, for the most part, as mentioned earlier, either sending employees to school for further training or importing these programs directly into the workplace through a contractual approach. Colleges, initially two year community and junior colleges and technical training institutes, because of their industrial preparatory nature, were the first beneficiaries of these relationships in the 1970's and then later four year colleges and universities expanded their services in this direction.

Although a model of university extension has existed since the early part of the 20th century, principally in American state and land-grant institutions, business and industry contract training became truly institutionalized throughout the higher education landscape only in the past twenty years, gathering steam in the past ten, and it is a rare campus that does not provide some form of business and industry training today. This is usually through the continuing education division since most programs are non-credit reflecting their brief, intensive, and specialized

focused dimension which are more difficult to achieve in traditional credit programs- except perhaps at the technical or community college level in which curricula are based in many cases on an industrial model.

I will touch upon state and municipal programs to illustrate a point about "archipelagoes of practice" which I believe is characteristic of all American continuing education. Just as the continuing educators involved in business and industry related continuing education programs are virtually a profession unto themselves, largely isolated from practitioners in university and other educational systems, state and municipal funded programs have created their own system of clients and professionals unified by their own unique set of programs.

In my state, New York, the programs identified by the state government as "continuing education" are predominantly basic skill or remedial in nature. They are implemented through the pre-collegiate K-12 (Kindergarten - 12th grade) public educational system. The programs are free to state residents (or with very minimal charges) and the school districts are compensated for running these programs based upon a funding formula that takes into account the "wealth" of each district. A typical state funded school program of this type will have courses in high school equivalency, basic literacy

(including English for the foreign born), and some vocational training in computer skills or perhaps in industrial arts or cosmetology.

These state programs are usually thought of as "terminal" in that they seldom directly address linkages or articulations with other types of formal education that a person might continue- such as college that could prepare them for greater social and economic mobility. I am not criticizing these programs for their specialized focus. I think this mindset is an inevitable outcome of the archipelago phenomenon in which the frame of reference is exceedingly narrow and restricted to a concept of normative practice defined by what other state funded programs are doing. It is inward looking, driven by a view of narrowly gauged perfectionism.

Through the Continuing Education Research Center (CERC) which I established at my university in a deliberate attempt to reach out beyond my own institution's conceptual *cul de sac* I have met scores of colleagues in the state funded, public school programs. They want to run "good" programs. They care inordinately about students and how well they do in class. They care about jobs and vocational placement. They want dedicated, effective teachers in the classroom. But, invariably, they have generally bought into, for

pragmatic reasons, a truncated vision of continuing education that forecloses, through inattention, access to subsequent formalized higher education. And, I submit to you- this point is crucial and critical for understanding the importance and promise of continuing education in America- it is the credentializing function of education, in particular, higher education that makes possible much social and inter-class mobility.

The state funded public school programs are what many average citizens think of as "adult education"- basic skills, remedial, and inescapably lower class. The public schools, however, have two facets or faces. If this one is "tragic"-dealing with limited cumulative disadvantage, discrimination, poverty and failure, the other is "comedic" addressing an institution's assumptions about liberal education for adults or otherwise defined as community education. Generalizing again, but I think accurately these programs are largely leisure and recreationally oriented including music, dance, arts and crafts, culinary arts, and sports. They are intended to be financially self sustaining through student fees. I have written in support of these programs praising their useful aspects- but essentially one is forced to recognize a prodigal anti-intellectual bias.

Public school adult educators are virtually free to offer

whatever programs they wish as long as the programs are fiscally solvent and non-controversial. This tends to eliminate, or suppress, any focus on important social and political issues. Who determines this absence of critical analysis? It is the school administrations and boards who feel they have enough difficulties administering their regular educational programs within a contentious political environment that makes public education a volatile stew of competing social and political forces.

Adult educators in the public schools thus develop a management philosophy that eschews conflict and instead values smooth bureaucratic functioning and making money, if at all possible, for the parent institution. It is a philosophy of the marketplace that views colleagues, even close ones, as potential competitors. It is an institutionally validated view of continuing education that is content with a limited range of options- at times smugly at ease with its circumscribed impact. It is hoped that CERC, by forging links between continuing educators in the workplace, public schools and universities, program administrators and students, will be able to see greater opportunities for multiple re-entry to the formalized degree granting curricula, beyond the "bread and circuses" of narrow vocational or leisure oriented programs.

I now wish to turn to what I think is the most important archipelago of practice in America- higher education, especially the university sector. This is the area I personally am a part of and the terrain that I know most intimately- both experientially and through scholarship. Let me enunciate what I think are some principles of continuing higher education.

Institutional focus. Once again, in the absence of any strong national direction, the institution is the strongest single determinant of the content and focus of continuing education on its campus. Factors that are at play are the history of the institution, the philosophy of its leaders, the natural resources of the campus (its faculty and programs), the supply of students- real and potential, the history and traditions of continuing education on that campus and the caliber of leadership and talents of the continuing education staff.

The constellation of internal forces which we can collectively refer to as "campus culture" sets the parameters within which the adult education staff operates (Edelson 1990a) . The administrative and programmatic literature of continuing education takes this culture as a given and suggests that through personally heroic and individual efforts success can be achieved through a

manipulation of that culture. I am even guilty of contributing to this corpus of writings wherein I have stressed various stratagems for success, notably adopting and adapting the dominant culture of academia (Edelson 1990b). Specifically this has meant changing some of the nomenclature used to define the continuing education unit, using certain program formats and quality control measures that are prevalent in the traditional academic arena, and so forth. Though well intentioned, I am now compelled to acknowledge the limited value of these stratagems, including the craft of "diplomacy" which I vigorously advocated for several years. This should be valued for its own sake and not for any institutional benefits that may accrue.

Since it is practically impossible (or perhaps I should say it is rare) for traditional academic leaders to have a well developed philosophy of adult education and to therefore fathom how continuing education relates to conventional education for regular full-time undergraduate and graduate students, campus cultures tend to mandate, through lack of compelling and competing alternatives a enrollment driven yardstick of accomplishment. Measured in terms of enrollment numbers or tuition driven and then "evaluated" in dollars, the "gross tonnage" approach (which in truth is also used to appraise research success in terms of dollars generated through grants) inappropriately applies a business metaphor

to an educational enterprise. This, I maintain, is normative or standard for American continuing education.

Profession focus. This second vector is now being looked at more closely by researchers and it is the subject of my current research and is, in part, responsible for my visit to your country- to help me identify comparative perspectives on this phenomenon.

For many years it has been commonplace among adult educators, especially administrators, to assume the convergence of professional and institutional values in continuing education (Votruba 1981). Continuing educators were and have been quick to point out how much they are a legitimate part of the dominant institutional culture and truly "belonged" alongside their other academic colleagues. Of course, few people outside of continuing education believed this but it has been a polite fiction up until changes in policies, especially budgetary cutbacks harmful to continuing education, made it impossible to maintain this illusion of commonality. Continuing educators in the United States, for example, maintained that they championed the officially espoused institutional values of access and opportunity-not realizing that the larger academic culture is built upon the pillars of elitism and exclusion- at least in the most important, trend setting schools that serve as

models for less prestigious colleges and universities.

Likewise, the student centered nature of much adult education emphasizing the affective dimension of the classroom, the need to individualize and customize curriculum, and the concern for students as "real people" with complex lives is at variance with the professionalism of academia that is research and publication oriented at the approximately twenty trend setting bench mark institutions which are hallmarks of American academic excellence. In these institutions professors teach fewer students for fewer hours than their less elite counterparts in order to advance research and scholarly pursuits. Instruction is discipline driven rather than oriented towards the "needs" of students.

The culture of continuing education professionalism has searched for ways of identifying ideological niches for adult education in order for it and, more importantly its practitioners, to gain acceptance. Using some concepts borrowed from the field of cultural anthropology, I call these belief systems "cults" so as to highlight their inspirational, prescriptive, and, sometimes, transitory natures (Lehmann & Myers 1985). In the balance of this presentation I will briefly introduce you to the cults of the academy, corporation, student, and lastly the cult of professionalism.

The cult of the academy, as I have suggested earlier, involves an emulation of academic culture and programs. For example, in continuing higher education a cult developed among evening college deans and directors of continuing education in the 1950's that centered about the revival of liberal education for adults. Underwritten by a number of grants from the prestigious Ford Foundation's Fund for Adult Education, liberal arts cultists created the Center for the Study of Liberal Education for Adults (CSLEA) and renounced the rampant vocationalism of American higher and continuing education seeking to construct a curriculum based on the study of the liberal arts. Centered around the scholarly Mecca of the University of Chicago, they saw themselves as true heirs of Western intellectual history, even more than the traditional academy which had by that time degenerated into what they viewed as a professionalism dedicated to scholarly minutia instead of the pursuit of wisdom.

Cult participants sought deliverance from their conditions of deprivation through specially developed curricula that addressed ways of studying art, literature and the Ways of Mankind, the actual title of a course and study guide developed for classroom use. There was a significant problem in gaining adherents to this cult since most continuing education deans and directors did not at that time perceive the existence of a sufficient "market" for those liberal

arts programs and therefore resisted their implementation. Because of this resistance a substantial amount of money was subsequently invested by the Fund for Adult Education to encourage colleges to create liberal arts programs that would be popular and "sell." Ultimately, a commercially successful product was developed, but for an already well educated, "upscale," genteel audience. This was not the traditional clientele served by schools of continuing education, which tended to come, especially in urban areas, from working class or lower middle class backgrounds (Edelson 1992).

A different type of academic cult was created around the concept of refined academic standards of excellence and sought to impose day school academic criteria upon part-time adult students. This cult attempted to refute charges of "soft pedagogy" in adult and continuing education by making night school adult education appear more stringent and rigorous (Dyer 1956).

Another major cult is the <u>corporate cult</u> where the model is the corporation rather than the academy. In this religion, ritual seeks to emulate the trappings and practices of the business world instead of academia. Admittedly, the line has become blurred for all of higher education in the post war period as business practices have progresively infiltrated

higher education management, but the movement has been especially triumphant in continuing education where the corporation itself has been raised to the level of the desired ideal (Gessner 1987). The roots of this development have always been present since continuing and adult education in the United States, and in some other countries as well, has been viewed as a type of business that is responsible for its own financing, to cite just one similarity with the commercial world. This practice can be traced back to the small, privately owned adult education schools of the early American republic. Also, the present affinity and intersection of collegiate adult education with corporate training and management development has served to make business a collaborator in continuing education compelling many adult educators to immerse themselves in that literature and culture.

It is not surprising, then, that the science of management can reach an apotheosis in some schools of continuing education with corporate cultists extolling the virtues of the latest management fad- TQM (Total Quality Management), MBO (Management by Objectives), ZBB (Zero Based Budgeting) and the most recent scriptures by Deming or Drucker. Even in dress, well tailored, conservative, business suits of the corporate realm replace the typical rumpled tweed of Mr. Chips. Professional development is more likely to require

mastering the latest approaches to marketing, office automation, or administration rather than understanding aspects of adult learning. The self-concept and professional model is the highly successful corporate CEO (Chief Executive Officer)- the Iaccocca or Agnelli rather than more modest and low profile humanist scholars who shun the limelight and other highly visible trappings of success.

In the cult of the student the adult student is worshipped as the *raison d'etre* of continuing education. Everything revolves about the student- program development, scheduling, selection of faculty and staff, and definitions of quality. The entire purpose of continuing education is made synonymous with what students want, need, desire or espouse. Instead of being one of several important factors to be considered in planning and decision making, student wishes and objectives displace other considerations and become the most powerful dynamic and determinant in adult education. Of course corporate cultists too can be accused of making the consumer king, but there the overriding motivation is to sell a greater number of products and generate higher profits. In contradistinction, student cultists worship the student *qua* student and not as the means to a different end.

The popularity of "andragogy" as a powerful and compelling movement among North American adult educators can be

accounted for the centrality and dignity this continuing education philosophy accorded to adult students and also to those who ministered to them. Knowles (1980), building upon an earlier literature including Havighurst's contributions (1956) from the field of psychology which helped to crystallize the meaning of adulthood developmentally, attempted to make, and for many succeeded, the profession of teaching adults (as opposed to pedagogy, which he operationalized as the profession of teaching children) a conceptually unique area. Adult educators thus had an official church wherein to worship the student.

The last cult I will touch upon is the cult of professionalism, or of the profession, which addresses the emergence of adult educators as professionals distinct from either corporate managers or academicians, and transcends the infatuation with andragogy, which ironically narrowly truncates and interprets professionalism client-centrically. Professionalism, since it is *a priori* driven by professional norms, must be more responsive to the centripetal forces of practitioners rather than the centrifugal demands of student consumers.

An important milestone in professionalizing adult education in the United States took place in 1915 with the formation of the National University Extension Association (NUEA)

representing deans and directors of continuing education extension in over thirty North American universities (Edelson 1991). Although never envisioned as an umbrella association for the entire adult education profession (like the American Association for Adult Education formed in 1926), the NUEA marks the first time continuing education practitioners succcessfuly banded together in a truly national organization in order to articulate and codify the uniqueness of their calling. Members were involved in a quest to determine what should be normative for their field and to simultaneously demarcate or separate themselves from adult educators in other higher education sectors, not even considering their brethren in sub-collegiate institutions. Codification for them necessarily entailed exclusion, two of the classic hallmarks of professionalization. The quest for an umbrella association of all adult educators which animated the AAAE and its descendants, *viz.* the AEA (Adult Education Association) and currently the AAACE (American Association for Adult and Continuing Education) can be likened to the search for the unified field theory in physics- an elusive Holy Grail that is like the food and drink of a tormented Tantalus, just beyond our reach.

What professionalism entails in adult education is yet to be fully defined. Clearly the field overlaps so many areas it cannot be conceived of as simply another academic discipline

as some scholars have wished. On the other hand, facilely collapsing adult education into the larger field of "education" has historically served to overshadow if not totally obscure its well-earned distinctiveness. Yet the search and need for professionalism has generated thousands of books, articles, conferences, symposia, and institutes yielding a wealth of knowledge that certainly exceeds the capacity of any single mortal to master. This information explosion about adult education is one of its distinctive characteristics and is a part of the field at its most molecular, individual, level. It is safe to state that wherever adult educators gather, there is this overarching epistemological need to understand and contribute to the creation of knowledge about adult education and to somehow attempt to address and resolve the difficult issues confronted in practice. I think it is fitting that I close on that note and hope that my thoughts have played a role in that significant progress.

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